

Historical Papers Communications historiques



Myths and Realities of African Resistance

A. S. Kanya-Forstner

Volume 4, numéro 1, 1969

Toronto 1969

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030717ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/030717ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (imprimé)

1712-9109 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Kanya-Forstner, A. S. (1969). Myths and Realities of African Resistance.
Historical Papers / Communications historiques, 4(1), 185–198.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/030717ar>

All rights reserved © The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada, 1969

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

MYTHS AND REALITIES OF AFRICAN RESISTANCE

A. S. KANYA-FORSTNER
Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge

Few "emerging themes of African history" have aroused so much interest in recent years as that of African responses to the imposition of colonial rule.¹ Why certain states collaborated with the Europeans while others chose to fight, the impact of resistance on traditional societies, and its possible significance for the subsequent development of modern nationalisms are subjects of much debate among African historians.² Students of European expansion too have come to recognize the influence of such factors as collaboration and resistance on the course and nature of the colonial occupation. No longer are they content to explain the Partition of Africa solely in terms of positive imperialist drives emanating from broad changes in the structure of the European economy or from the intensification of great power rivalries. Some historians, indeed, have thrown the whole concept of nineteenth-century imperialism on the mythological scrap heap. For them, the Partition was little more than a series of unplanned and reluctant *European* responses to "local crises" provoked more often than not by the mobilization of violent African opposition to the European presence.³ This determination to free the study of the Partition from an obsolete Europocentrism and to focus attention on Africans as well as on their conquerors is certainly to be welcomed. But historiographical revisions, however necessary, have their pitfalls and can produce their own distortions. There is little point, after all, in seeking to destroy the myth of aggressive European economic imperialism simply to make room for the myth of uncompromising African military resistance.

The study of Islamic resistance is especially prone to such a temptation. It has often been noted that Muslims "carried out the longest and bloodiest fighting against the forces of Europe".⁴ The

¹ See: T. O. Ranger (ed.), *Emerging Themes of African History* (Dar es Salaam, 1968). The chapter on resistance by Professor A. B. Davidson of Moscow University illustrates the contemporary political if not the scholarly significance of the theme.

² Research into these problems is most far advanced in East and Central Africa, thanks largely to the pioneering efforts of Professor Ranger and the Department of African History at Dar es Salaam. The most recent contribution to the debate is: T. O. Ranger, "Connexions between 'Primary Resistance' movements and modern mass nationalism in East and Central Africa", *Journal of African History*, IX (1968), pp. 437-53, 631-41.

³ This view is stated most forcefully in R. E. Robinson and J. Gallagher, "The Partition of Africa", in *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. XI, esp. pp. 593-620.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 619.

militant Islamic empires of the nineteenth century, with their tradition of literacy, their relatively advanced material cultures and the cohesive power of their supranational creed, were certainly capable of organizing widespread and prolonged opposition to a European invasion. The nature of these empires, established by holy war, territorially expansive, militarily strong, infused with the spirit of religious revival and social reform, seemed to preclude the possibility of collaborating with the invaders. Their rulers, theocrats claiming a divinely inspired mission to purify the faith and extend its sway, could not cooperate with Christians without undermining the religious foundations for their political authority. European expansion threatened not only their independence but also their religious integrity and with it the basis for their socio-political organization. Their response was therefore likely to be violent.

It is equally true that much of their resistance was directed, by force of historical circumstance, against the French. When the latter invaded Algeria in 1830, the *sufi* religious brotherhoods which already acted as focal points of opposition to the Ottoman régime mobilized their followers against the Christian enemy and proclaimed the *jihād* under the leadership of the emir Abd el-Kader. So tenacious was his resistance that it took the French fifteen years and ultimately a third of their army to overcome it. Even after the emir's surrender, Muslim rebellion remained a constant threat to French security; the last major uprising was not suppressed until 1881.⁵ In that same year, the military promenade to Tunis sparked off a violent rebellion among the southern tribes which forced the French into an ill-prepared and costly summer campaign. South of the Sahara, French expansion produced similar results. *Al-Hajj* Umar, *khalifa* of the Tijaniyya brotherhood and founder of the Tukulor empire, resisted the French advance up the Senegal in the 1850's, and his son Ahmadu fought to preserve his independence thirty years later. The *imam* Samori, ruler of a powerful Mande empire on the Upper Niger, resisted even more fiercely and managed to keep the French at bay for almost twenty years. Given the scale and nature of these movements, it is all too easy to inflate their importance and make religiously inspired resistance the central theme of African political development and the root cause of French expansion as well.⁶

Yet there is ample evidence that militant Islam was not by itself an absolute barrier to cooperation with the French and that Muslim resistance was not motivated solely or even predominantly by reli-

⁵ For these rebellions, see: C. Trumelet, *Histoire de l'insurrection dans le sud de la province d'Alger*, 2 vols. (Algiers, 1879-84); and C.-R. Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France* (Paris, 1968), vol. I, pp. 56-66.

⁶ Eg. Robinson and Gallagher, "The Partition of Africa", *loc. cit.*

gious factors. In Algeria, where the struggle was most ferocious, not all Muslims took part. The Tijaniyya brotherhood, for example, steadfastly refused to accept the leadership of the rival Kadiyya order and collaborated wholeheartedly with the French instead.⁷ Nor was Abd el-Kader himself primarily a religious leader. Although the emir derived considerable authority from his religious prestige and strove to establish a puritan Islamic society governed by the precepts of the *sharia*, he made no claims to be a religious reformer and was content to accept the spiritual suzerainty of the Sultan of Morocco. Abd el-Kader's principal objectives were secular: to weld the heterogeneous tribes of the interior into a unified Algerian nation, to replace local attachments with a common loyalty to a higher national ideal, and so to create a new political system strong enough to withstand the pressures of European expansion.⁸

The emir's secular ambitions, moreover, determined his response to the French. The defence of independence was of course a religious obligation as well as a political necessity, but the *jihād* was never aimed at driving the French into the sea. Abd el-Kader was quite prepared to accept their presence on the Algerian coast if they in turn recognized his authority over the interior and agreed not to interfere with his subjects.⁹ When they seemed to accept these conditions, he had no qualms about making peace and negotiated two agreements, one in 1834 and a second in 1837. French violations of these treaties rather than any change in the emir's policy led to the resumption of hostilities in 1835 and to the outbreak of the final conflict after 1839.¹⁰ When the French military advance destroyed the territorial unity of the infant Algerian nation and reduced Abd el-Kader to a peripatetic guerrilla leader, the character of the resistance did become increasingly religious, and its leadership passed into the hands of local *marabouts*. But by then the French had already won the struggle for mastery in Algeria.¹¹

⁷ For the attitude of the Tijaniyya to Abd el-Kader and to the French, see: J. M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya, a Sufi Order in the Modern World* (London, 1965), pp. 62-77.

⁸ The secular character of Abd el-Kader's policies is emphasized in: R. Gallissot, "Abd el-Kader et la nationalité algérienne", *Revue Historique*, CCXXXIII (1965), pp. 339-68.

⁹ Eg. Abd el-Kader's declaration, cited in: M. Emerit, *L'Algérie à l'époque d'Abd el-Kader* (Paris, 1951), p. 148: "Si vous borniez votre occupation à Alger, Bône, Oran, je pourrais vous souffrir près de moi, car la mer ne m'appartient pas, je n'ai pas de vaisseaux."

¹⁰ The final conflict was sparked off by the passage of a French expeditionary force through territory ceded to Abd el-Kader in the secret clauses of the Treaty of Tafna. The French at the time were seeking to renegotiate these clauses.

¹¹ This is the interpretation advanced in R. Gallissot, "La guerre d'Abd el-Kader ou la ruine de la nationalité algérienne (1839-1847)", *Hespéris-Tamuda*, V (1964), pp. 119-41. The relative unimportance of the later rebellions is stressed in Ageron, *op. cit.*

The Tukulor empire in the Western Sudan conformed much more closely to the conventional pattern of a *jihad* state. Unlike Abd el-Kader, *al-hajj* Umar did proclaim himself a Reformer specially appointed by God to purge the Faith of heresy, rid the Sudan of animism and re-establish the Islamic community in all the pristine purity of the Rightly Guided Caliphate. For Umar, temporal power was simply a necessary tool for the fulfilment of a religious mission, and the *khalifa* often professed himself contemptuous of the political kingdom.¹² His reputation as a latter-day prophet was the source of his charisma and the magnet which attracted his following. Religious disciples, the *talibés*, held many of the senior posts in his administration and formed the crack regiments of his army. The prosecution of the *jihad* against the animists provided the movement with its initial impetus and served as the very *raison d'être* of the state.

Yet here too the context of Franco-African relations was determined by secular, political factors. The extension of Umar's *jihad* to the Upper Senegal after 1853 coincided with the beginnings of the French advance upstream from the coast, and control of the river thus became the chief point of conflict between the two sides. More significantly, Umar at first did his best to avoid a confrontation, for his ambitions on the Lower Senegal were limited to securing new recruits, and he was anxious to use the French as trading partners and suppliers of modern weapons.¹³ During a tour of his native Futa Toro in 1847, he had assured the French of his friendly intentions and has asked them to sell him arms. Even after the first skirmishes at the end of 1854, he repeated his assurances and offered to protect French trade if the latter refrained from political activity along the Senegal. Only when the French gave military support to Umar's enemies in the riverain states did the conflict intensify. For a time thereafter, the war did assume formidable proportions; 20,000 warriors besieged the French advance fort at Médine in 1857. But when Umar, convinced by his losses that further conflict was futile, diverted his attention eastward to the kingdoms of the Upper Niger, he too concluded a truce.¹⁴

¹² For a general discussion of the doctrinal aspects of the Islamic revolutions in West Africa, see: J. R. Willis, "Jihad fi sabil Allah — its doctrinal basis in Islam and some aspects of its evolution in nineteenth century West Africa", *Journal of African History*, VIII (1967), pp. 395-415.

¹³ Most of Umar's *talibés* were Tukulors from the Futa region of Senegal, but it is doubtful whether the *khalifa* ever intended to incorporate the territory into his empire.

¹⁴ For the negotiation of the agreement and its terms, see: Y. Saint-Martin, "Les relations diplomatiques entre la France et l'empire toucouleur de 1860 à 1887", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*, série B, XXVII (1965), pp. 184-8.

After the death of the *khalifa* in 1864, both the character of his empire and its relations with the French were profoundly altered. Umar's death during a rebellion in the newly-conquered province of Masina marked the end of his *jihād's* expansive phase; thereafter the empire remained constantly on the defensive. As the more humdrum and more difficult tasks of consolidation had to be faced, the high ideals of the movement were debased, and the ascetic *talibés* soon became a privileged and self-seeking aristocracy living on revenues extorted from their largely Bambara subjects. The original fervour of the *jihād* and with it much of its cohesion were lost. Latent dissensions rose to the surface and exacerbated the almost inevitable dispute over the succession. Umar's designated successor Ahmadu, lacking his father's unchallenged religious authority, failed to secure the loyalty of the *talibés* and had also to contend with the conspiratorial activities of his rebellious half-brothers.¹⁵ The new Sultan did his best to keep the spirit of the *jihād* alive, and in 1868 he proclaimed himself *amir al-muminin* (commander of the faithful). But this move had little effect; by 1870 small groups of *talibés* were leaving the empire to return to their homes on the Lower Senegal.¹⁶ Deprived of religious charisma, Ahmadu had to build up an entourage of personal favourites and came to rely increasingly on the support of the converted Bambaras who made up the infantry regiments of the army. Like many other *jihād* states, the Tukulor empire was gradually transformed from a theocracy into an essentially secular despotism.¹⁷

The secularization of the empire was reflected in its relations with the French. Ahmadu's objectives were the same as his father's: to preserve the independence and integrity of the state, to gain additional revenue by levying duties on French trade, and above all to obtain modern weapons. But his policies were based exclusively on diplomacy instead of military force. He negotiated treaties with the French in 1866, 1874 and 1880. Throughout the following decade, despite the steady extension of European military control, the Sultan kept the peace. By 1887 the religious imperative to resist had become so irrelevant that "the commander of the faithful" accepted the "aid and protection" of the French in return for their pledge not to invade what remained of his empire. This was something Umar would never had contemplated.

¹⁵ Although Ahmadu was the eldest of Umar's many children, he was the son of a commoner, and Umar's sons by a princess of Sokoto resented their subordination to him. Their conspiracy, however, was crushed in 1873.

¹⁶ Governor of Senegal to Ministry of Marine and Colonies, 15 May 1871, Section Outre-Mer des Archives Nationales [SOMAN hereafter] Sénégal I 56/b.

¹⁷ The most famous example of this transformation was that of the Mahdist state under the *khalifa* Abdallahi. See: P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898* (Oxford, 1958).

The empire of Samori differed radically from the more orthodox products of the nineteenth-century Islamic revival. Its founder was the scion of a *dyula* trading family which had settled by the headwaters of the Niger during the eighteenth century and had gradually abandoned its allegiance to Islam. To escape the monotony of village life and the constraints of a gerontocratic society, Samori became a trader and accepted Islam as a necessary tool for his commercial activities.¹⁸ His conversion was sincere, and he undoubtedly attached great importance to Islam as a cohesive force in state-making. His empire possessed many of the attributes of an Islamic state. Its judicial system was based on Koranic law and was administered by a corps of *cadis*; mosques were built; provisions were made for Koranic education, and Samori styled himself *amir al-muminin*. But the cultural traditions embodied in the *jihād* states to the north were missing. Samori himself, barely literate in Arabic, was hardly a religious reformer. His authority was derived not from religious prestige but from his demonstrated abilities as a military commander. Similarly, his empire drew its strength and dynamism not from a religious mission but from a formidable military organization geared for political and economic reasons to territorial expansion.

Yet Samori put up a much fiercer and more protracted struggle against the French than the Tukulors under Ahmadu. Clearly, this cannot be explained in religious terms, and even those who assert the significance of the Islamic factor in African resistance recognize the importance of other considerations. The response of an African state to European expansion, they claim, was determined by its social and political organization and military strength at the time of the confrontation. Empires on the rise, still powerful and expansive, whose socio-political structure and military organization were geared to conquest and whose economies depended on slave raiding, had a greater capacity and incentive to resist than declining empires whose territories were contracting, whose societies were disintegrating and whose military strength had been sapped.¹⁹ There is much to be said for this argument. Samori certainly possessed the necessary strength to resist. His army, 50,000 strong at full mobilization, was a remarkably well organized military machine. Its backbone was the professional infantryman, the *sofa*, 200-300 of whom were recruited and trained by each of the empire's ten provincial commanders. The bulk of the troops were conscripts, also recruited locally. An elite corps of 500 *sofas*, trained under Samori's personal supervision, pro-

¹⁸ For Samori's origins and early career, see: Y. Person, "La jeunesse de Samori", *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, XLVIII (1962), pp. 151-80; and *idem*, *Samori, une révolution dyula* (Nîmes, 1968), vol. I, pp. 235-304.

¹⁹ Robinson and Gallagher, "The Partition of Africa", *loc. cit.*, pp. 617-20.

vided the senior commanders for the provincial armies. Each army corps was organized down to squad level, with unit commanders generally mounted on horses imported from the north. By the 1880's most *sofas* were armed with muskets purchased from European traders on the coast or manufactured by local blacksmiths. By the 1890's, many of them possessed the latest repeating rifles.²⁰

The structure of the state provided the incentive to resist. Local revenues were devoted to the maintenance of the army, whose principal functions were raiding and territorial conquest. Slave raiding was an important feature of the empire's economy, for the sale of slaves to neighboring states provided the gold needed to purchase arms from the coast.²¹ Social mobility was determined by prowess in war, and even the position of the senior commanders depended entirely on the efficient execution of their duties. A military empire like this had little to gain from cooperating with the Europeans, and when Samori's troops ran up against the advancing French columns, a clash was inevitable. The first skirmishes took place in 1882 and soon escalated into a full-scale war in which the *sofas* gave as good as they got. By the end of 1885 they had driven the French back from the upper reaches of the Niger and were within sight of the latter's base camp at Bafoulabé.²²

Abd el-Kader and his Algerian nation also lend support to the argument. If not a religious revivalist, the emir was most certainly a social and administrative reformer. Breaking completely with Ottoman practices, he standardized justice and taxation, rooting out corruption and abolishing old privileges. Instead of maintaining the semi-feudal character of the Ottoman *beylik*, he divided his state into eight provinces and took the first steps toward the creation of an efficient and honest salaried bureaucracy.²³ Realizing the importance of military strength, he created a new regular army of 10,000, paid and supplied by the central Treasury and placed under the command of the provincial governors. A locally recruited volunteer militia raised his total strength to 50,000. Arms were imported from Morocco, and some weapons were manufactured locally. To supplement the

²⁰ For a useful account of Samori's military organization, see: M. Legassick, "Firearms, horses and Samorian army organization, 1870-1898", *Journal of African History*, VII (1966), pp. 95-115.

²¹ By 1885 Samori also possessed a direct source of gold in the Buré region of the Upper Niger.

²² I am grateful for this information to Professor Yves Person of the Université de Dakar.

²³ The senior officials of the state, the *khalifas* and *aghas*, were appointed by the emir, and the *khalifas* at least were salaried. In addition, councillors responsible directly to the emir supervised the financial administration of each *aghalik*. For the administrative organization of the state, see: Gallissot, "Abd el-Kader et la nationalité algérienne", *loc. cit.*, pp. 257-64.

traditional defense line based on the urban centres of Tlemcen, Mascara and Miliana, he built a second line of fortified posts further south. The most important of them, Tagdempt, became his administrative capital. Similar attention was paid to tactics, and the emir's mastery of the principles of mobile warfare enabled him to hold his own and more during the initial conflict with the French in the 1830's. By 1839, Abd el-Kader's attempt to create an Algerian nation was on the point of success.²⁴ Ultimately, however, the emir's power rested on the loyalty of his subjects, and this in turn depended on the protection which the state could provide. It was for this reason that he answered Marshal Valée's expedition through his territory by devastating the French settlements on the Mitidja plain.²⁵

The relationship between resistance and political and military strength was most evident of all in the Tukulor empire.²⁶ When Umar first collided with the French, his *jihād* was entering its most expansive phase. The religious power of his preaching and the success of his army assured a steady flow of Tukulor recruits. Victorious campaigns against the animists and their enforced conversion further swelled his ranks. Despite heavy losses, his military strength rose steadily from 12,000 to 30,000. The mounted *talibés* and many of the *sofa* infantrymen were armed with muskets and rifles purchased from traders in the Gambia and Sierra Leone. Local gunsmiths serviced the weapons and manufactured ammunition. The army even possessed two serviceable artillery pieces which had been captured from the French.²⁷

After the *khalifa's* death, however, much of this strength evaporated. The rebellion in Masina and *talibé* desertions soon reduced the army to 4,000 *talibés* and 11,000 *sofas*. Its fighting spirit was lost, and factional strife between *sofa* and *talibé* seriously reduced its military effectiveness.²⁸ The political situation deteriorated

²⁴ For the political and military organization of the state on the eve of war, see: P. Fournier, "L'état d'Abd-el-Kader et sa puissance en 1841 d'après le rapport du sous-intendant militaire Massot", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XIV (1967), pp. 123-57.

²⁵ C.-A. Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine: La conquête et les débuts de la colonisation* (Paris, 1964), pp. 150-1.

²⁶ This theme is developed in greater detail in A. S. Kanya-Forstner, "Tukulor Resistance to the French Conquest of the Western Sudan", to be published in M. Crowder (ed.), *African Military Resistance to the European Occupation of West Africa*.

²⁷ On these weapons, see: Y. Saint-Martin, "L'artillerie d'El Hadj Omar et d'Ahmadou", *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.*, série B, XXVII (1965), pp. 560-72.

²⁸ Gallieni to Governor of Senegal, 14 Oct. 1880, SOMAN Missions 16, Gallieni 1880: "L'empire toucouleur actuel n'est plus formé que des débris des vastes conquêtes du prophète El Hadj [Umar]... Aujourd'hui l'armée d'El Hadj [Umar] n'existe plus."

still more alarmingly, for Ahmadu had to contend not only with factionalism in the army and the Tukulor ruling class but also with the much graver menace of rebellion from below. Bambara insurrections plagued the empire throughout its existence and made effective consolidation impossible. A Bambara rebellion in Segu prevented Ahmadu from sending reinforcements to his father in Masina and kept the province in turmoil until the end of the 1860's. Rebellions were endemic in the province of Kaarta during the 1870's, and insurrections in the Beledugu region interrupted its communications with Segu. By the early 1880's Tukulor influence on the Upper Senegal had been destroyed by Malinke rebellion and the French advance, and the empire itself had been virtually split in four.²⁹ The Sultan's direct control was limited to the province of Segu. Masina had become an independent state under the rule of his cousin Tijani. His brother Aguibu had become *de facto* ruler of Dinguiray province in the far south. His brother Muntaga in Kaarta still accepted his authority, but in 1885 he too rebelled and had to be deposed. Military weakness and political instability were the crucial factors behind the Sultan's desire for an accommodation with the French. It was their spurious promises of military aid which persuaded him to negotiate with them.

But it would be wrong to argue that, in some paradoxical fashion, a declining African state could exercise greater flexibility in its response to European expansion than an expanding one.³⁰ In the case of the Muslim empires of north-west Africa the reverse was, if anything, true. The pragmatic attitude of Abd el-Kader and Umar to the French has already been noted. Even Samori, whose state by its nature seemed destined for uncompromising resistance, enjoyed a similar freedom of manoeuvre. When the French counter-attack drove him back across the Niger, he too made peace. When he attacked the kingdom of Sikasso in the east, he too accepted a French protectorate in the vain hope of European military support against his African enemies. The options open to Ahmadu, however, were much more restricted. The internal dislocation of his empire and the constant threat of Bambara rebellion made it absolutely essential for him to avoid a military confrontation with the powerful and aggressive French. The Sultan cooperated because he had no other choice; no matter how great the French provocation, recourse to arms had to be ruled out. Accordingly, Ahmadu did not oppose the French advance

²⁹ On the significance of anti-Tukulor rebellions, see: B. O. Oloruntimehin, "Resistance Movements in the Tukulor Empire", *Cahiers d'études africaines*, n° 29 (1968), pp. 123-43.

³⁰ Cf. E. T. Stokes and R. Brown (eds.), *The Zambesian Past* (Manchester, 1966), pp. xxiv-xxxi.

beyond Médine after 1880. He did nothing about the destruction of his stronghold at Murgula in December 1882 nor about the occupation of Bamako on the Niger the following spring. He made no attempt to prevent the French from launching gunboats on the river, although he knew that they could pose a direct threat to his capital.³¹ When the campaign against Samori and the outbreak of a rebellion on the Senegal created a major crisis for the French after 1885, Ahmadu did not exploit their temporary weakness but actively helped them to restore order.³² Only when the French, having consolidated their power in the Senegal-Niger valley, launched a direct attack on Segu did the Sultan abandon his now irrelevant diplomatic strategy and make a last despairing effort at resistance.

This point is important for two reasons. First of all, it helps to place the problem of European expansion and African response in a more realistic perspective. The threat of European expansion, no matter how serious it became in the long run, was rarely a constant or immediate preoccupation of African policy-makers. Only the *jihād* of Abd el-Kader was from the start directed specifically against the French, and even here the European factor was but one element in the emir's calculations. Before 1840, his first concern was to establish his authority over the disunited tribes of the hinterland. This rather than defence against the French was his army's principal task, and its major campaigns were waged against the old privileged Makhzen tribes and the dissident Tijaniyya brotherhood. The empires of the Western Sudan were not created in response to the pressures of French expansion but were the products of purely African processes.³³ The prosecution of the *jihād* against the animists was always Umar's overriding preoccupation. Even when he fought the French on the Senegal in the 1850's, most of his forces were engaged in the conquest and consolidation of Kaarta.³⁴ Thereafter, the focus of his activity was shifted eastward, 400 miles beyond the frontiers of French control. The French did not enter into Samori's reckoning until 1881, by which time the foundations of his empire had been solidly laid. His subsequent campaign across the Niger, moreover, was merely one facet of a much more impressive military advance directed simultaneously northward against the Tukulor empire and south into the Guinea forest and the hinterland of Sierra Leone.³⁵

³¹ Delanneau, rapport complémentaire, n.d., SOMAN Sénégal IV 82/a.

³² Ahmadu gave the French military support in suppressing the insurrection of Mahmadu Lamine, for the latter was a claimant to Umar's spiritual legacy and his sworn enemy.

³³ This was true even of the Samorian empire, whose formation owed nothing to direct European pressure and little to the indirect influence of expanding European trade. See: Person, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³⁴ The only exception to this, of course, was the siege of Médine in 1857.

³⁵ Person, *op. cit.*, pp. 427-523.

French pressure on Ahmadu was of course much greater, but the pressure of Bambara rebellion was greater still. Before 1889, the French were by comparison a long-term threat, and the Sultan had little time for long-term planning. During the initial period of European contact, the central problems of all these empires remained predominantly African; not until the final confrontations did the danger of French expansion cease to be a peripheral consideration.

Secondly, the course of Franco-Muslim relations underlines the fact that the response of an African state to European expansion was determined not only by its own nature and strength but also by the character and intensity of the European challenge. The nature of the Algerian *jihād* may have lowered the threshold of conflict, but the character of French expansion was even more decisive. Algeria was the bailiwick of the French army; here its independence was most firmly established and its aggressiveness had freest play.³⁶ Algeria was also an area of European colonization, with all the danger to Algerian land tenure that this entailed. Samori's resistance after 1891 was also a direct response to French aggression. Seriously weakened by his unsuccessful campaign against Sikasso, the *imam* had been anxious to avoid trouble and had signed a new treaty in 1889, abandoning his remaining territories on the left bank of the Niger. Only when the French, having dealt with Ahmadu, crossed the Niger and attacked his capital at Bissandugu did he decide to fight. Ahmadu did not make the same choice until the French had reduced his alternatives to war or unconditional surrender and the complete destruction of his empire.³⁷

Having opted for resistance, all the empires fought as best they could, but the significance of their resistance must not be exaggerated. Ahmadu's military effort was in fact pathetically ineffective. His dispirited armies were no match for the French with their battalions of *tirailleurs*, their repeating rifles and their modern artillery. The Tukulors did not even enjoy a significant advantage in numbers, for the French expeditionary columns were supported by massive levies of Bambara auxiliaries anxious for a chance to strike back at their former masters.³⁸ Most important of all, the empire lacked either unity or mobility. The Tukulors, themselves an alien ruling class, could not hope to mobilize a concerted national resistance; but they could not abandon their territories either, for they had

³⁶ The most useful short account of the Algerian army is given in Julien, *op. cit.*, Cap. VI.

³⁷ This was made perfectly clear after the capture of Segu when the French immediately restored the former Bambara dynasty and deported the Tukulors back to the Lower Senegal.

³⁸ Some 1,500 Bambaras marched with the French against Segu, 3,000 against Ouossébougou, 1,300 against Nioro.

grown too dependent on the revenues which they extracted from them. In the end, they had to stand their ground and meet the French in open battles where the full superiority of the latter's fire-power could be brought to bear. Not surprisingly, they never stood a chance.

Abd el-Kader and Samori managed to give a much better account of themselves. Both still possessed sufficient authority to organize the mass of their people for war. Both were accomplished military leaders, and both appreciated the need to offset the technological superiority of European armies with the techniques of guerrilla warfare. Relying on the mobility of his armies, Abd el-Kader avoided set-piece engagements and concentrated on attacking French supply lines and stragglers. Samori adopted a scorched earth policy, retreating before the French columns and systematically destroying all local sources of provisions as he went. Unable to draw their enemies into decisive battles, the French were thus committed to a protracted series of costly and by no means always successful campaigns of attrition.³⁹

But the outcome was never in doubt, for the very nature of guerrilla war doomed its practitioners to eventual defeat. Guerrillas cannot function indefinitely without secure bases, and these were precisely what Abd el-Kader and Samori lacked. The emir evacuated his fortified positions, hoping to compensate for the loss of his administrative centres by tying the French down to a sterile occupation. But in so doing he was forced to move south into territories where his authority was not firmly established. When the French modified their own tactics and began to attack Arab interests instead of armies, his support quickly melted away. Abd el-Kader was soon forced to seek refuge in Morocco, and when French pressure on the Sultan deprived him of this base too, the war was as good as lost. Samori's strategic withdrawals created similar problems. Having abandoned his territories on the Upper Niger, the *imam* tried to carve out a new empire for himself in the northern hinterland of the Ivory Coast. But the hostility of the local population prevented him from establishing a solid new base of power. The efficiency of his army, equipped now with modern weapons, enabled him to hold out for four years;⁴⁰ but by 1898 he was again in retreat. When the French finally captured

³⁹ After a particularly fierce encounter with the *sofas*, the French commander admitted: "La guerre actuelle avec Samory n'offre aucune analogie avec celle que nous avons faite jusqu'à ce jour au Soudan. Les troupes de Samory combattent absolument comme des troupes européennes, avec moins d'adresse au tir il est vrai, mais avec plus d'acharnement." Humbert to Governor of Senegal, 12 Jan. 1892, SOMAN Soudan I 2/d.

⁴⁰ By the 1890's Samori's army possessed at least 4,000 repeating rifles; some estimates put the figure as high as 8,000.

him, this one-time ruler of a million subjects had been reduced to a leader of 100,000 refugees.

Resistance, it is true, had its effects on African political development. The war against France provided Abd el-Kader with the incentive and the opportunity to create a new Algerian nation, and his memory was to inspire future Algerian nationalists.⁴¹ The impact of Sudanese resistance was equally long-lasting. The relationship between Samori and President Sekou Touré of Guinea is by no means entirely coincidental, and there might even be a case for regarding the *Union Soudanaise* of Mali as the direct heir to the tradition of Tukulor resistance.⁴² But once more the significance of all this must not be exaggerated. The ferocity of the Algerian revolution owed much less to Abd el-Kader's struggle for independence than to the violence inherent in the French colonial system. What galvanized the Algerian revolutionaries was not the memory of 1840-47 but the Sétif massacre of 1945. In the Western Sudan too, much more research is needed before the connection between "primary resistance" and modern mass nationalism can be asserted as confidently as some have done.⁴³

African resistance admittedly influenced French expansion as well. The war against Abd el-Kader in Algeria shaped a generation of the French army and was later to condition the attitudes of the French military in the Western Sudan to the empires of Umar, Ahmadu and Samori. Their resistance in turn affected the timing and the direction of the European advance and determined the nature of the military empire which the French themselves were to establish.⁴⁴ Even the rebellion in southern Tunisia was not without significance for domestic French politics and the subsequent formulation of colonial policies.

But Islamic resistance was not the cause of the French conquest. Abd el-Kader's attack on Mitidja did not confront the French with the bald choice of "getting on or getting out"; by then the military had already decided on his empire's destruction.⁴⁵ The Tunisian rebels

⁴¹ One of the earliest Algerian nationalists in the twentieth century was Abd el-Kader's grandson, the emir Khaled.

⁴² This connection has been suggested by Ruth Morgenthau and Thomas Hodgkin. See, *inter alia*, R. Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 266-7, 280-2.

⁴³ It has yet to be fully explained why the most serious early rebellions against colonial rule were organized not by Tukulors but by France's erstwhile Bambara allies.

⁴⁴ See: A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: a Study in French Military Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1969), *passim*.

⁴⁵ Eg. Marshal Valée's report, 9 February 1838, cited in Julien, *op. cit.*, p. 146: "Le but unique que le gouvernement doit atteindre est l'établissement de la domination française du Maroc à Tunis, de la Méditerranée au désert." Cf. Robinson and Gallagher, *loc. cit.*, p. 596.

did not force the French into an unplanned military occupation of the Regency; the latter's intentions had already been made plain in the Treaty of Bardo.⁴⁶ In the Western Sudan, France was not "dragged into vast imperial conquests" by the forces of a "reviving and recalcitrant Islam"; what spurred her soldiers on was less their fear of Muslim resistance than their confidence in the inability of the Muslims to resist effectively.⁴⁷ Here as in North Africa, the motives for the conquest must ultimately be sought in the deliberations and decisions of the policy-makers in Europe and in the ambitions of their military agents on the spot.

African historians would do well to bear this in mind. It is both natural and proper for them to concentrate on African rather than European processes, as I myself have tried to do in this paper. But they should not dismiss the motives of the conquerors as being of no account, for without them they cannot fully understand the responses of the conquered. *A fortiori*, students of the Partition must continue to leave room in their interpretations for the positive factor of European imperialism. A generation ago, the Partition was regarded simply as an aspect of European expansion. This can no longer be the case, and no one need regret the passing of the old-style colonial historian. But the Partition remains more than an episode in African history, and those who study it cannot afford to become narrow Africanists either. Only one approach is open to them. They must become *new-style* colonial historians, or, if you prefer, *new-style African* historians.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Article Two of the Treaty provided for the occupation of those points which the French military authorities considered necessary for the restoration of order and for the security of the frontier and coastline. Cf. Robinson and Gallagher, *loc. cit.*, p. 596.

⁴⁷ Kanya-Forstner, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-8, 118-19, 133, 179, 185, 269. Cf. Robinson and Gallagher, *loc. cit.*, p. 609.

⁴⁸ Cf. E. T. Stokes, "Malawi Political Systems and the Introduction of Colonial Rule", in Stokes and Brown (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 354: "... European activity cannot be seen purely in terms of a reflex to an African stimulus. Due allowance has to be given to an important element of European purposiveness and premeditated design, not to perpetuate old-style colonial history but to construct a new-style African history."